Bellingham Historical Commission, Publisher

Crimpville Comments

Established 1973

Issue #225, fall 2020

Honoring Bellingham's Veterans

Each November we honor and remember our veterans with ceremonies throughout the country.

For the past eight years Bellingham has held Veterans Day Ceremonies. This tradition began as a collaboration between the Bellingham Library and the Memorial & Veterans Day Committee. Last year, for the celebration of the town's 300th Anniversary, the ceremony was moved to Bellingham High School. Due to social distancing guidelines, this year's ceremony was held on the Town Common.

Bellingham's history of service in the military dates back to the War of Independence and continues through current times. During the American Revolution, Deborah Sampson disguised herself as a man and enlisted in the Continental Army under the name Robert Shurtliff. Her unit was first quartered in Bellingham. She was the only woman to earn a full military pension for participation in the Revolutionary Army.

The focus of this issue, our first since the reorganization and revitalization of the Historical Commission Board, is to highlight some Bellingham veterans, be they native born or from other locales.

We thank them for their service and we hope you enjoy reading their stories.

Janet Parnes as Deborah Sampson at a Bellingham 300th Anniversary event.

James Hastings, USMC 1967-1968

Realizing he might be drafted, James (Jim) Hastings decided to join the U.S. Marine Corps in 1967 and served in Vietnam until 1968. He was wounded and saw friends die.

As the longtime chair of the Memorial/ Veterans Day Committee, Jim has taken on the role of ensuring that veterans from our town and beyond, are honored and remembered. Each year Jim and the members of his committee plan the Memorial Day Parade, as well as a ceremony on Veterans Day to honor local veterans.

Jim was the mastermind behind the group that brought The Wall That Heals, a Vietnam Wall replica, to Bellingham in 2019.

We thank Jim for his unyielding dedication to our veterans and his determination to see that they are remembered each year.

Jim Hastings speaking at a Wall That Heals event, August 2019

BELLINGHAM VETERANS STORIES

Mary Guerin Cole US Navy 1969-1972

Mary Guerin Cole was born in Woonsocket in 1948. She lived in Bellingham, and graduated from BHS in 1966.

Her grandparents, Hubert and Emma Guerin, moved to Bellingham when they married in 1912. They lived on what was then Scott Hill Road, now South Main Street. They came from Woonsocket where her grandfather worked for his uncle who owned the woolen mills.

Her father started Guerin Bros. Lawnmower Sales & Repair next door to their home. Her mother and father, Raymond and Alice Guerin, remained in Bellingham until 1986 when they relocated to Florida.

Mary noted she still has BHS friends in Bellingham that she keeps in touch with, including Mary Vadenais Dexter and Gail Bagdasarian King.

She left Bellingham after high school to attend Boston College and then was recruited to the Navy.

She enlisted in December of 1969 as an Ensign at the Boston JFK Federal Building. She was still in nursing school at the time and they paid for her last year of school in exchange for two years of service.

She attended basic training in Newport, RI, and began service at the Chelsea Naval Hospital two months before her wedding in 1970.

The Naval Officers were thrilled she had Intensive Care Nursery experience and Mary worked in the Dependents Building taking care of very ill newborns.

She oversaw the Corpsmen who worked doing primary nursing in the ICU. While on active duty there for almost two full years, Mary became pregnant and was told she could not stay. Her orders did not arrive for a few months so she completed her duty time.

Her daughter was born at Chelsea Naval Hospital in April of 1972. She feels the Navy was excellent training for life, and a future career in nursing and nursing management.

> "WE WERE TOLD THAT WE HAD TO LEARN HOW TO GET ON AND OFF A SHIP PROPERLY, BUT WE WERE ALSO TOLD THAT WOMEN WERE NOT ALLOWED ON A SHIP???"
> **MARY COLE**

Mary ended her submission with a curious fact. Her husband could not enter the PX, as it was explained to her that men worked, so he was not allowed a card for entry! She informed them that most of the Navy wives worked and could use the PX, but no one heard her complaints. She called her congressman and it took 2 years (she calls it an act of Congress!) to get it changed!

Salvatore Pilla turns 100! WWII, Army National Guard

On 12/24/2020, former Bellingham resident Sal Pilla, will turn 100 years old. Our best wishes to Sal on this milestone birthday!

Sal served in the D-Day invasion of Normandy, France, and at the Battle of the Bulge in Germany.

He worked at the Draper Mill for 30 years, was a Bellingham firefighter for 20 years, and at the age of 77 began working at Market Basket in Bellingham as a bagger, where he worked well into his 90s. Sal left Bellingham in 2018 and now lives at a retirement home in Maine.

Photo courtesy Bellingham Bulletin

Robert Donahue, US Navy 1958-1966

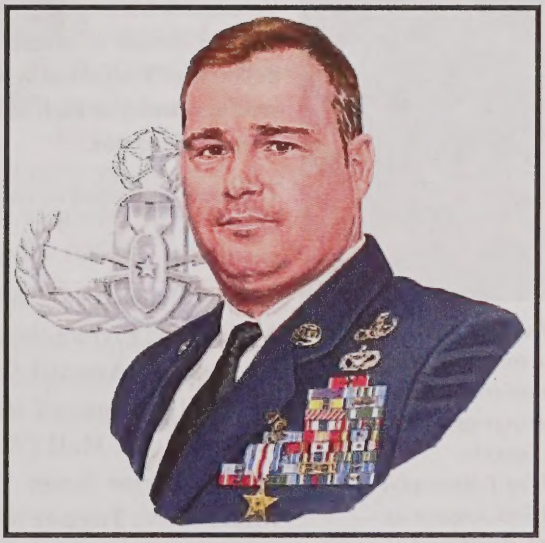
In 1958 Robert (Bob) Donahue entered the College of the Holy Cross and joined the NROTC program as a Midshipman. When he graduated, he was commissioned as an Ensign in the Navy. Bob was assigned as a Communication Officer to a ship on the West Coast, the USS Rainier (AES). He was responsible for all communications to and from the ship, including encrypted communications and was sent to "Crypto School" becoming a cryptography expert.

After two years, he requested a transfer to the East Coast. Bob was then promoted to Lieutenant Junior Grade (LTjg), and spent two years on the USS Great Sitkin (AE17). He carried a Top Secret clearance and had a lot of "special operations" activity, that he cannot discuss, except in general terms.

While on the East Coast, he made several cruises to the Mediterranean as part of NATO operations. Some were scary and others were lots of fun. He had dinner with Jacques Cousteau and had afternoon cocktails with the King and Queen of Greece.

Some time during the final 6 months of his tour Bob was promoted to full Lieutenant and offered a job as an Admiral's aide. He would have had to extend his tour for another two years, but instead decided to return home to his young family.

Master Sgt. Joseph Deslauriers USAF 1998 - 2014



Master Sgt. Joseph Deslauriers joined the United States Air Force after graduating from Bellingham High School in 1998.

In September of 2011, he was in a convoy in Afghanistan that was in charge of clearing homemade bombs. While clearing a route, his group encountered several improvised explosive (IED) devices. While walking a path he had previously traversed, an IED exploded causing him to lose both of his legs and part of an arm. Joseph had already served one tour in Kuwait, one tour in Iraq and three tours in Afghanistan, and was awarded the Silver Star for his actions.

His wife, Lisa, was pregnant with their son Cameron when the incident occurred. He spent two years in and out of the hospital undergoing surgeries, receiving intense physical therapy, and learning how to live as a triple amputee.

Since the incident Joseph has been on a long road to recovery. In 2013, The Building Homes for Heroes Foundation built a new home for him and his family in Florida. He continues to work at the Air Force Special Operations Command Headquarters as the EOD Program Manager.

He is a true Bellingham hometown hero!

BELLINGHAM'S 2020 VETERANS DAY CEREMONY

Bellingham resident Jay Rowe and 2002 BHS grad Laura Stanikmas join Jim Hastings at the War Memorial for a wreath laying ceremony.

On Veterans Day, November 11, 2020, Bellingham honored veterans, past and present, at an outdoor ceremony on the Town Common. Due to the COVID pandemic, an indoor venue was not possible.

The ceremony began with a wreath laying at the War Memorial, and then shifted to the gazebo for the National Anthem, Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation.

Opening remarks were made by Jim Hastings of the Veterans Day Committee. The ceremony featured a trio of local speakers:

Laura Stanikmas, a 2002 BHS grad and resident who served in the Army as a combat medic.

Jay Rowe, a 1982 BHS grad and resident who joined the Army Reserves in 1980 and then the Marine Corps. He was discharged in 1987.

David Cutler, current principal of Bellingham Memorial School, joined the US Navy after graduating from Milford High School. He served two combat tours in Iraq.

The keynote speaker was Army Command **Sgt. Major Stephanie Cleveland,** garrison sergeant major of the Natick Soldier Systems Center since 2019.

BELLINGHAM'S 2020 MEMORIAL DAY PROGRAM

Bellingham Fire Chaplain Rick Marcoux and Memorial Day Committee Chair Jim Hastings at the Walter Lenktis World War I Memorial on Hartford Avenue at Plymouth Road.

Memorial Day, May 25, 2020 was near the height of the initial COVID pandemic shut down and a traditional Memorial Day Parade was not possible. Jim Hastings of the Veterans & Memorial Day Committee stepped outside of tradition and honored Bellingham's departed veterans by hosting a brief ceremony at each of the town's memorial squares.

The memorial squares visited, in order, were:

Walter Lenktis (WWII), Hartford Avenue and Plymouth Road
Herbert B. Arnold (WW I), Hartford Avenue and Maple Street
Theodore B. Hall (WWII), Maple Street and Pine Street
Charles W. Turner Memorial Bridge (Medal of Honor, WWII), Hartford Avenue at McDonald's
Edward Baldiga (WW II), Hartford Avenue and North Main Street
Thomas Berardi (Korea), Hartford Avenue and Monique Drive
Edward L. Spencer (WW I), Bellingham Center
John Peterson (Vietnam), Cranberry Meadow Road and Indian Run Road
Albert Prefontaine (WW II), South Main Street and Elm Street
Armand Levesque (WWII), Linwood Avenue and Westminster Street
Leandro F. Rotatori (WWII) and **Augusto L. Bozzi** (WWII), entrance to Advanced Auto, Pulaski Boulevard
Harold Trudel (WWII), Route 126 and Bellingham Street
Francis T. Monterio (WWII), Center Street at Pulaski Boulevard

In addition, brief ceremonies were conducted at the Memorial Middle School, the World War I and Peterson Memorials at Old Town Hall, and the Civil War and War Memorials on the Town Common.

BELLINGHAM HOSTS THE WALL THAT HEALS

In August of 2019, during Bellingham's 300th Anniversary Celebrations, Jim Hastings and the rest of the Veterans & Memorial Day Committee brought the Vietnam Wall replica, the Wall That Heals to our town.

After months of fundraising and tremendous support from many members of the community, the town was able to host this once in a lifetime event.

Hundreds of residents attended the often very moving ceremonies and walked through the grounds during the three days the memorial was at the Bellingham High School fields on Blackstone Street.

Sacrifice
by Chloe Enright
2nd Place Winner
Town Events Category
Belligham 300th Anniversary
Photography Show

BELLINGHAM IS A PURPLE HEART COMMUNITY

In November of 2019, Bellingham became a Purple Heart Town. When Jim Hastings learned from retired Millville Police Chief Tim Ryan of the concept, he approached Bellingham Town Administrator Denis Fraine, who approached the Bellingham Selectboard, who were immediately receptive to the idea. They signed a proclamation designed by Blackstone Valley Tech students. Signs showing Bellingham as a Purple Heart town, like the one in the photo, have been installed in the following locations: the Bellingham-Medway Line on Route 126; the Bellingham-Blackstone Line on Route 126; the Bellingham-Mendon line on Route 140; the Bellingham-Franklin line on Route 140; and on Route 126 opposite the 495 exit on the north side.

Photo courtesy of The Bellingham Bulletin

Former and current Bellingham residents who were awarded a purple heart include Walter Caniff (USMC), James Coppinger (USMC), Michael Crawley (USMC), Edgar Ferland (USMC), James Ferrone (US Army), Stephen Gray (USMC), Brian Hughes (USMC), George Leduc (USN), and Gerard St. Germain (USMC).

Raymond Richards III is a Purple Heart recipient who served in Iraq. Purple Heart recipients who moved to Bellingham include Paul Thibault, Patrick Pisani, Joseph Oulette and Jim Hastings.

MEET YOUR COMMISSION MEMBERS

Chair: Rick Marcoux - BFD Chaplain and Retired Bellingham Firefighter

Vice Chair: Steve Joanis - Engineer, former CAP Mission Pilot and frequent speaker on topics related to 18th century New England.

Secretary: Bernadette Rivard - Bellingham Library Director and co-author of "Bellingham Now & Then: Celebrating the 300th Anniversary of Bellingham, MA."

Bob Donahue - Former Bellingham School Committee member who also served on numerous town school building committees, history buff and resident since 1969.

Priscilla Compton - Our longest serving Commission member; she has served since 1999!

Pam Johnson - Publisher of the Bellingham Bulletin and designer and co-author of "Bellingham Now & Then: Celebrating the 300th Anniversary of Bellingham, MA."

Franco Tocci - Born and bred Bellingham native. Amateur historian.

Museum Renovation Update & How You Can Help!

Over the summer, the Commission members, with the cooperation and encouragement of the town administration, led by Town Administrator Denis Fraine, and assisted by a cadre of volunteers, embarked on a project to update the museum facility.

When the museum moved into the former library building in the late 1980s/early 1990s, no facility upgrades were done. It was time for a fresh coat of paint and more.

In July, we began by boxing up the collections from the book shelves and moving larger items into the basement of the building to be stored while the upstairs was renovated. We were assisted by community volunteers for this project, including a few BHS football players.

Town Carpenter Ron Paulhas and his senior volunteers painted the walls and ceiling. He also fabricated fabulous new covers for the radiators. We contracted with Bellingham resident and Owner of Car-Leo Floor Covering in Milford, Carl DeIeso, to replace the worn, outdated carpet with new weathered oak laminate flooring. New bamboo window shades have been purchased to update the window treatments. Gary Remillard, of G&L Electric, assisted by electrician and commission member Rick Marcoux, will be updating the lighting.

We are now working on reorganizing the collections in order to make the museum a more cohesive, browsable collection of Bellingham history. The museum will have sections with categories of history, including: schools and municipal items; farming and household artifacts; sports and recreational materials; military, public safety and civil defense items; as well as a reference library section that will feature town reports, school yearbooks, and past issues of the Crimpville Comments. Immediately upon entering, there will be a display case that will depict the Best of Bellingham.

We have had great support from the town making this project possible. We are now at the point when we are reaching out to members of the Bellingham community for financial support in order to complete the project. We are in need of the following furnishings and supplies to complete this project at the level we feel the community deserves: New display cases, tables and chairs, as well as supplies for a professional display of collections.

Below are some of our before and after photographs of the renovation. On the next page are details about our sponsorship and donation opportunities. We'd greatly appreciate your support!

Before
Old carpet, wall hangings and curtains awaiting updating!

After
This area is the left corner of the "before" picture.

Museum Renovation Sponsorship & Donations

As we reorganize our collections, we are looking for community support through sponsorships and donations.

All sponsors will be recognized on a plaque that will be on display at the museum when we reopen (tentatively scheduled for Spring 2021).

Platinum Sponsors:	*$1000*
Gold Sponsors:	*$500*
Silver Sponsors:	*$250*
Bronze Sponsors:	*$100*

Yes! I will sponsor the museum renovation at the _____ level.
Enclosed is my sponsorship in the amount of _____.

Sorry, I cannot sponsor the renovation, but I want to make a donation to support the efforts of the commission. Enclosed is my donation in the amount of _____.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State, Zip: _____

Email: _____

Checks should be made payable to
Bellingham Historical Commission Gift Fund and mailed to:
Bellingham Historical Commission
3 Common Street
Bellingham MA 02019

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Home of the
Ernest A. Taft Jr. Historical Museum

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The Crimpville Comments is mailed free to long time subscribers and is available electronically on the Commission's website, https://www.bellinghamma.org/historical-commission.

You can subscribe to the Commission's electronic newsletter which will link to the Crimpville Comments here:
https://bit.ly/3dwc5sf
or return the form to the right with your email address.

New subscribers to the print edition are encouraged to make a suggested $20 annual donation to help defray printing and mailing costs.

The Commission also has a gift fund which can accept donations from the community. As we move forward, we would appreciate your support!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State, Zip: _____

Email: _____

____ Yes I would like to subscribe to the print edition. Enclosed is my donation (suggested amount $20.00). Make the check payable to *The Crimpville Comments.*

____ Yes, I would like to subscribe to the electronic newsletter and my email address is above.

_____ Yes, I would like to make a donation to the Bellingham Historical Commission. Make the check payable to the *Bellingham Historical Commission Gift Fund.*

All correspondence should be mailed to:
Bellingham Historical Commission
3 Common Street
Bellingham MA 02019